

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

English in Action (EIA): mobile phones as an agent of change for large-scale teacher professional development and English language learning in Bangladesh

Conference or Workshop Item

How to cite:

Walsh, Christopher and Shaheen, Robina (2013). English in Action (EIA): mobile phones as an agent of change for large-scale teacher professional development and English language learning in Bangladesh. In: American Educational Research Association Annual Conference 2013, 27 Apr - 01 May 2013, San Francisco, CA.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2013 The Authors

Version: Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk



From the

AERA Online Paper Repository

<http://www.aera.net/repository>

Paper Title English in Action (EIA): Mobile Phones as an Agent of Change for Large-Scale Teacher Professional Development and English Language Learning in Bangladesh

Author(s) Christopher Walsh, The Open University; Robina Shaheen, The Open University

Session Title Teacher Development and Technology

Session Type Roundtable Presentation

Presentation Date 4/30/2013

Presentation Location San Francisco, California

Descriptors Curriculum Design and Evaluation, Distance Learning, Teacher Education - In-Service/Professional Development

Methodology Mixed Method

Unit SIG-Technology as an Agent of Change in Teaching and Learning

Each presenter retains copyright on the full-text paper. Repository users should follow legal and ethical practices in their use of repository material; permission to reuse material must be sought from the presenter, who owns copyright. Users should be aware of the [AERA Code of Ethics](#).

Citation of a paper in the repository should take the following form:
[Authors.] ([Year, Date of Presentation]). [Paper Title.] Paper presented at the [Year] annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved [Retrieval Date], from the AERA Online Paper Repository.

English in Action (EIA): Mobile phones as an agent of change for large-scale teacher professional development and English language learning in Bangladesh

1. Purpose / objective

Examples of mobile phones being used with teachers to provide teacher education and continuing professional development (CPD) in emerging economies at scale, is largely absent from the research literature. We outline English in Action's (EIA) model for providing 80,000 teachers CPD to improve their communicative language teaching (CLT) in Bangladesh over nine years. EIA's CPD program is delivered face-to-face and supported through open distance learning (ODL). This innovative model of teacher CPD is supported through peer learning and self-study using a variety of print, audio and video resources. Drawing on the success of EIA's pilot phase intervention, where external evaluation reported significant improvement in teachers' and students' English language competence after one year as well as changes in classroom practice, the current phase is using low-cost mobile phones, or the 'trainer in your pocket' (Walsh, 2011; Walsh et al, 2013) to deliver CPD to 12,500 teachers through 2015. We believe EIA's teacher CDP model is best suited to assist the project in achieving one of its primary goals: to increase the English language proficiency of 10 million students allowing them to access to the global economy, (Shaheen et al, 2013).

EIA is a nine-year (2008-2017) international development project that strives to develop the communicative English language skills of 25 million Bangladeshis. This is through a partnership which includes the Government of Bangladesh, BMB MacDonald, The Open University and BBC Media Action. This paper focuses on EIA's provision of an innovative school based professional development (SBPD) model by The Open University (UK). The model leverages the power of mobile phones by providing teachers with hundreds of audiovisual resources—both for classroom teaching and professional development—on micro secure digital (SD) cards. This coupled with cyclical face-to-face cluster meetings over 16 months and a variety of print resources aim to meet the project goal of improving 12 million students' communicative English language skills from 2012 to 2017.

2. Perspectives or theoretical framework

Providing teacher CPD in a developing country at scale is a unique challenge if it is to have similar successful outcomes like those reported on in the literature from the developing world. In what follows we outline how English in Action (EIA), arguably one of the largest English teacher CPD programs in the world, is currently providing 4500 teachers (2012) with a robust CPD program that leverages the power of low-cost mobile phones. The SBPD model encourages English teachers to change classroom teaching practices—making them more communicative—to improve the English language competencies of 300,000 primary and secondary students.

3. Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry

EIA's developmental research, baseline and follow-up studies were carried out with 690 teachers and 132,700 students (2008– 2011). The developmental research helped the project explore the use of mobile technologies for English teachers' CPD and the delivery of audio resources for classroom use that led to current use of low-cost mobile phones with resources on micro SD cards. This low-cost technology kit is sustainable into the future, because the project can distribute its resources on 2GB micro SD cards that are relatively cheap and teachers can put them in their own phones.

During EIA's pilot phase (2009-2010) primary and secondary English teachers were provided extensive audio and visual resources on the Apple iPod Touch (for primary teachers) and iPod Nano (for secondary teachers) with portable rechargeable speakers. The iPods assisted teachers in learning and trying out new CLT practices with their students. Importantly, these MP3 players also provided primary teachers' with audio resources specifically produced to match every lesson in the national textbook series *English for Today* for grades one through ten (545 audio files). This gave teachers and students examples of Bangladeshis speaking textbook content in English. The Nano also provided primary teachers with songs for the beginning and end of every lesson, and a range of supplementary songs, poems and dialogues. For primary teachers' CPD, the Nano also included 18 video clips and 4 audio recordings that exemplify a range of correct and incorrect English CLT classroom practices.

Secondary teachers received fewer additional classroom resources because they generally have higher levels of English language proficiency and have received more pedagogical training. The secondary teachers were also supplied with 46 audio files dedicated to teacher CPD on the iPod Touch. The secondary teachers' iPod Touch was preloaded with audio podcasts enhanced with synchronized text and images as well as 12 CPD videos to be used with a print-based teacher professional development package entitled, *English for Today in Action*, that they can learn from, adapt and use to teach communicative English.

The iPods were chosen because the project believed the teachers would find the use of the Apple MP3 players relatively easy. Although iPods were more expensive than other devices, they were chosen because they had the functionalities the project believed necessary to provide teacher CPD through ODL. They were also chosen because they made it easy to deliver classroom-based audio resources the project produced that were aligned with the national textbook. These crucial resources played on portable rechargeable speakers were essential for improving the communicative English proficiencies of both students and teachers.

4. Data sources, evidence, objects and materials

4.1 Internal research monitoring and evaluation (RME)

Remarkably, the 2011 internal study indicates that when primary teachers were talking, they used English 71% of the time. This marks a pronounced increase from an earlier baseline study where only 27% of teachers spoke in English more than they did in Bangla. The amount of time primary students were talking in English rose from 4%

(reported in an earlier baseline study¹) to 88% after one year of participating in EIA. Observations also indicate students were engaged in communicative learning activities where they were either speaking in chorus (40%); talking on their own (30%); talking as part of pair work (14%) or speaking in group work (16%). The study also reported similar results for secondary teachers and students. When secondary students were talking, they used English 88% of the time. 39% of the time they were talking on their own, but they were also frequently engaged in both pair (31% of the time) and group work (26% of the time).

4.1 External research, monitoring and evaluation (RME)

Trinity College London externally evaluated the project using the Trinity Graded Examinations in Spoken English (Trinity College London, 2007). Each interviewee's spoken English was evaluated against the criteria of the 12-point Trinity College English Language scale. Grade 1 represents very little spoken English competence and Grade 12 indicates complete competence. The grades are sub-divided into four stages: initial (Grades 1-3); elementary (Grades 4-6); intermediate (Grades 7-9); and advanced (Grades 10-12). In 2010, Trinity assessors used questionnaires to assess 4630 primary and 2609 secondary students' English language competence before their teachers participated in EIA's CPD program. Then in 2011, Trinity assessed 786 primary and 318 secondary students from the 2010 cohort. For primary students, prior to the teachers' participation in EIA, 64.3 % of students failed to pass the Trinity's graded examination. In 2011, that number dropped to 49.9%. In 2010, 35.4% of the students scored initial levels (passing) levels of English language competency and this number rose to 50.1% in 2011. In secondary while the proportion of students who failed (below grade 1) dropped from 28.9% to 10.4 % in 2011, the number of students who passed at the initial levels (grades 1-3) rose from 61.9% to 66.6%. Students passing at the elementary level (grade 4-6) rose from 9.2% to 22.4 % a considerable increase. Both internal and external evaluation of the pilot phase indicates EIA's teacher CPD which included the use of the iPods, were successful at encouraging higher percentages of teachers and students to speak English in the classroom. Additionally, the Trinity research indicates that teachers and students acquired higher levels of communicative (speaking and listening) English language competency after participating in the project.

5. Results and/or substantiated conclusions or warrants for arguments/point of view

EIA understands, from their research, and what exists in the literature, that mobile technologies offer increased opportunities by providing more choice in when, where, and how teachers teach and how students learn. Unlike many other funded international development projects specific to mobile phones, EIA has been conceptualised to intentionally address issues of scale, embedding and quality for the present and future. Budget constraints mandated that EIA construct multiple kits to field test and pilot the use of the 'trainer in your pocket' idea for the current upscaling phase (2012-2015), while also thinking post 2015 when there will be much less funding available for the approximately 67,500 teachers to whom EIA will still be required to

provide a program of CPD. As result of the field test of the two low-cost mobile phones and 4GB micro SD cards and portable rechargeable speakers from March to September (2011), EIA designed a new technology kit that has been distributed to 4000 teachers (June-July 2012) across Bangladesh. The kit consists of the Nokia C1-01 (£35) mobile phone, a portable rechargeable Lane amplifier (£25) and all of EIA's CPD materials and classroom audio resources on 4 GB micro SD cards (£2).

After the pilot phase of the project, all of EIA's CPD materials were revised for use with the new mobile phone-based 'trainer in your pocket'. Each primary and secondary teacher received the new technology kit and an EIA produced teacher guide. Separate teacher guides were authored and produced for both primary and secondary teachers. Additionally, guides were also produced for teacher facilitators. Each primary and secondary teacher guide contains 8 modules to be used over a 16- month cycle of teacher CPD. Teachers' mobile phones or the 'trainer in your pocket' have an extensive number of audio and video files (more than 100) for CPD that are used in tandem with each of the 8 modules in the teacher guide. These ODL resources explain different CLT pedagogies using a narrator followed by a classroom video that exemplifies how to use the CLT pedagogy. The narrator then returns to prompt teachers to try similar activities in their classrooms. The narrator (Figure 1) first introduces the activities in Bangla (for the primary teachers) then a video illustrating the CLT practices in a real Bangladeshi classroom (Figure 2) using EIA audio or visual resources are shown. Afterwards, the narrator comes back on to explain what the teachers have just viewed in the video and encourages them to 'try it' (similar activities) in their classroom.



Figure: EIA's "trainer in your pocket" narrator



Figure : EIA's 'trainer in your pocket' example of classroom practice

6: Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work

EIA's model for teacher CPD assists teachers in learning and applying their communicative English language teaching practices in the classroom. Through the supported SBPD model using the 'trainer in your pocket' the classroom becomes the nexus of learning. With EIA's model, teachers are not left alone to make sense of the ODL materials. Rather, they engage with the materials while receiving support from a teacher-partner within their school, a community of teacher colleagues from their sub-districts and through bi-monthly cluster meetings over the course of 16 months. This unique program, illustrated in Figure 3, helps teachers to develop, support and sustain new English CLT practices that are student centered and markedly different from the kind of teaching and learning that was observed in the projects' six baseline studies¹.

¹ To see project research visit <http://www.eiabd.com/eia/index.php/2012-10-11-09-41-47/research-publication/research-report>

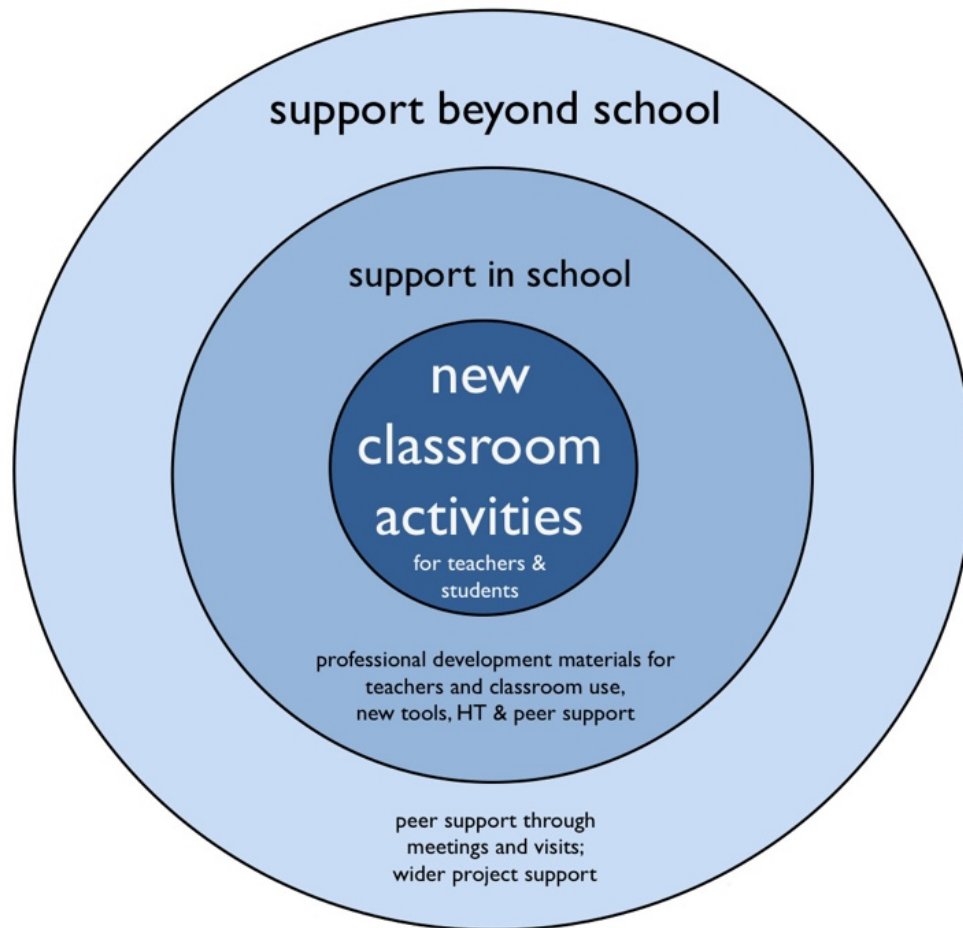


Figure 3: EIA's CPD model to support changes in classroom practice (Walsh and Power, 2011)

EIA's model of SBPD and the 'trainer in your pocket' is assisting teachers to learn and apply their communicative English language learning in the classrooms, schools and communities where they work—at scale. Presently 4500 teachers are participating in the 16-month course of CPD and every teacher has the suite of audio and visual resources on the their mobile phone or 'trainer in your pocket'. EIA's teacher professional development program will support 80,000 teachers in working collaboratively to initiate, trial and reflect upon new English CLT practices with the goal of adapting and embodying these strategies in their professional practice. They will continue to be supported in this because it is not a model of teacher CPD that is delivered through traditional ODL (self- study), nor is it traditional teacher training in which the training and support is offered at a center that is physically and conceptually 'distant' from the teachers' context of practice— their classroom. Rather it is a dynamic, generative and leverages teachers' use of their mobile phones by providing high quality audio and video resources that can be used for self-study and English classroom teaching regardless of time, place or location.

Without being overly presumptuous, drawing on the success of the pilot phase of the

project, as shown through the research findings, and current feedback from the 4500 teachers using 'the trainer in your pocket' with over 300,000 students, we argue EIA's model is a low-cost solution well suited to deliver teacher professional development at scale, which is timely and replicable for other developed and developing contexts.

List of References

English in Action. (2011). The classroom practices of primary and secondary school teachers participating in English in Action. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Author [online]. Available from: <http://www.eiabd.com/eia/research-reports/Research%20Report.pdf>

Shaheen, Robina; Paul, Ashok Kumar and Hassan, Masud Ul (2013). [Learning English: its use and benefits: views from Bangladesh](#). In: *6th BELTA International Conference 2013 Multiple Realities of English: ELT & Beyond*, 18-20 January 2013, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Trinity College London. (2007) Graded examinations in spoken English 2007_2010. Available from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/resource/?id_1487 [Accessed 1 July 2012].

Walsh, C.S., 2011. E-learning in Bangladesh: the 'trainer in your pocket'. In: G. Singh ed. *IADIS International Conference e-Learning 2011, a part of the IADIS Multi Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems 2011*, 20-23 July 2011, Rome, Italy, 165-172.

Walsh, C. S. and Power, T., 2011. Rethinking Development and the Use of Mobile Technologies: Lessons from Bangladesh. In S. Barton et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of Global Learn Asia Pacific 2011*, 2163-2172.

Walsh, C.S., Power, T., Khatoon, M., Kumar, S.B, Paul, A.K., Sarkar, B.C., & Griffiths, M. (2013). The 'trainer in your pocket': Mobile Phones within a teacher continuing professional development (CDP) program in Bangladesh. *Professional Development in Education*, Vol 39. Iss. 2, pp. 186-201.

Walsh, C.S., 2011. E-learning in Bangladesh: the 'trainer in your pocket'. In: M.B. Nunes and M McPherson (eds.) *IADIS International Conference e-Learning 2011, a part of the IADIS Multi Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems 2011*, 20-23 July 2011. Rome, Italy: 165-172. IADIS Press. Available from http://sep.mdu.edu.tw/ezfiles/0/1000/academic/37/academic_7118_1127959_92557.pdf

Walsh, C., Shaheen, R., Power, T., Hedges, C., Khatoon, M. and Mondol, M.S.(2012) '[Low Cost Mobile Phones for Large Scale Teacher Professional Development in Bangladesh](#)', Mlearn 2012, 16-18 October, Helsinki, Finland (<http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-955>)

